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Cultural Connotations at and above Word Level 厦门大学

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学 位 论 文

Cultural Connotations at and above Word Level

— Language choice in Chinese Propaganda

(词汇层面上的文化内涵: 中国宣传语言的选择)

丁 菲 菲

指导教师姓名 (职务, 职称, 学位, 单位名称及地址)

连淑能 厦门大学外文系主任 博导 教授 厦门大学

申请学位级别 硕士研究生

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Synopsis

This paper mainly deals with culture-bound words in Chinese propaganda and their translation in cross-cultural communication. Based on the accepted theories as well as a great many facts and examples, the author expounds and analyzes the making, development and gradual weakening of one distinct feature in Chinese propaganda revolutionary language. Meanwhile, the dissertation also points out the problems which the revolutionary language presents in current cross-cultural communication. In conclusion, the writer suggests some translation strategies concerning the culture-loaded words in Chinese propaganda. The paper is divided into six parts.

Part I begins with an introduction of rhetoric and propaganda. Rhetoric is defined as a 'political science'. It is an art of using effective means to persuade audiences either to do or not to do something. One way to achieve successful persuasion is propaganda. The study of propaganda, according to Ellul (1973: 61), can be dealt through two major ways: psychological method and sociological approach. Still, different definitions are given to propaganda by people with different cultural and political backgrounds. China is one of the three great propaganda blocs in the world (the other two are U.S.A and the former USSR) today, representing an entirely unique style of propaganda. Therefore, the study of it is of great importance for our cross-cultural communication.

The study of propaganda cannot be done without considering first its own features. In part II, two types of propaganda are given a detailed analysis. Ellul divides propaganda into two modes: agitation propaganda and integration propaganda. Agitation propaganda, characteristic of explosive and revolutionary movement, aims at arousing the most violent sentiment hatred. A typical example is the Cultural Revolution (1966 - 1976) launched by Chairman Mao Zedong. The propaganda of integration is generally regarded as a continuation of the former. It is a propaganda of conformity by inserting the individual into the new society without resistance. Propagandists have to adjust their choice of language use in conformity with different modes of propaganda.

Part III explains word choice in Chinese propaganda. This part focuses on the most distinct feature in Chinese propaganda — revolutionary culture and language. Revolutionary culture has undergone three periods: (1) before Liberation (1930s — 1940s); (2) Cultural Revolution (1966 — 1976); and (3) since the reform and opening to the outside world (1978 —). During its protracted historical period, revolutionary culture, together with revolutionary language, has seen its course of making, development and gradual weakening.

Part IV discusses the problems revolutionary language presents in current Chinese propaganda. As a sociological phenomenon, propaganda is subjected to different historical background and determined by the given political, cultural and economic features. Considering their distinctive features, propagandists employ different types of propaganda in their work. With the gradual weakening of revolutionary culture, the once frequently used political terms and fiery words are seen and heard less and less. However, it is hard to say that they have been abandoned once and for all. They still occupy a certain position in current Chinese propaganda, covering a wide range of economic, political and social fields and posing a lot of translation problems.

Part V suggests some strategies for dealing with revolutionary language in translation. The act of translating is to fill up the gaps between languages. It does not take place in a vacuum, for "many words are profoundly affected by their contexts both linguistic, cultural, and situational" (Newmark, 1991:25). Therefore, a translator's basic job is to help the reader to move a little nearer to the meaning of the source message. Based on Nida's 'dynamic equivalence', desirable where there exists a distinct cultural gap between the source language and the target language, the writer suggests four ways to solve the translation problem of revolutionary language: explanation, appropriate for publicity as the situation is more important than the language; neutralization, or the act of deculturalising a cultural word; transplantation, possible because there exists in language and culture learning a certain degree of tolerance; and the weakening of fiery words.

The paper ends in part VI with a conclusion of the relationship between language, culture and translation. Language and culture are closely inter-related. A language reflects certain aspects of a society, the shift of focus of a culture. Cultural values are embodied in language. On the other

hand, language is greatly influenced by culture. Language cannot be properly treated except in terms of its status and functions as a model of culture. Translating is actually a bridge linking language and culture; and translators mediate between cultures, seeking to overcome those incompatibilities which stand in the way of transfer of meaning.

Key words: propaganda, revolutionary language / culture

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Cultural Connotations at and above Word Level

Language choice in Chinese Propaganda

Part I Introduction: A definition of rhetoric and propaganda

A. Rhetoric: Aristotle's political science, persuasion

Rhetoric is a "political science". Aristotle defines it as "the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion" (Ross,1924:1355b). Generally, rhetoric is not bound up with any single definite class of subjects, but is as universal as dialectic (the art of logic discussion). Its function is not simply to succeed in persuading, but rather to discover the means of reaching as near such success as the circumstances of each particular case allow. Rhetoric is, actually, a branch of dialectic and also of ethical studies. The latter may well be called political, and for this reason rhetoric masquerades as "political science".

Rhetoric study, in its strict sense, is mainly revolved around the modes of persuasion. At its most basic level, persuasion may be thought of as "attitude change toward a source's proposal which has resulted from a message designed to alter beliefs about the proposal" (D. A. Infante et,1990:168). According to Aristotle, there are three modes of persuasion: (1) source credibility, referring to the personal character of the speaker; (2) emotional appeal, that is, putting the audience into a certain (the right, fit, required) frame of mind, and (3) proof or apparent proof, provided by the words of the speech itself. In other words, the three major ways speakers persuade audiences are *ethos*, the Greek term for source credibility; *pathos*, arousing the audience's emotions and feelings; and *logos*, the words, ideas and arguments in the speech. To be a good persuader, one must be able to (1) to reason logically, (2) to understand human character in their various forms, and (3) to understand the emotions that is, to name and describe them, to know their causes and the way in which they are excited.

The three modes settled by Aristotle has a profound influence on the latter scholars, who have been trying to put forward more new approaches to persuasion. That W. N. Brigance

advanced his genetic approach based on Aristotle's theory is just one such case. Brigrance gave three modes of persuasion quite similar to those of his ancestor: the first kind is Authority, or Personal Prestige; the second, the acceptance of ideas by assembling them with material familiar to the hearer colorful words, effective phrases, figures of speech and such; and the third is Reason.

Rhetoric as a political science is an art of using effective means to urge the audience either to do or not to do something. One way of achieving successful persuasion by an organized institution is propaganda. Propaganda has now become a very general phenomenon in the modern world. China is one of the great propaganda blocs in the world today in terms of scope, depth, and coherence. It represents an entirely unique type and method of propaganda. So what is propaganda? How has it developed in China? What function has it played in Chinese mass media in this century? What measures has it taken to arouse so large a population? What influence has it had? And what problems does it bring about to modern China in cross-cultural communication? These are what this paper is going to discuss in detail in later chapters. But first, Let's see what propaganda really means.

B. Propaganda: Ellul; psychological, sociological

A correct definition of propaganda is difficult to give because it connotes different meanings in different cultures and different political systems. Most Western people think that it is composed only of lies and "tall stories" and that, conversely, what is true cannot be propaganda. A second idea is that it serves only to change opinions. *Collins COBUILD English Language Dictionary* defines propaganda as "information, frequently exaggerated or false information, which is spread by political groups in order to influence the public, usually used showing disapproval". Hence, propaganda is a derogatory term.

In China, however, propaganda and the propagandists have a quite different status. To most Chinese people, propaganda means to state and explain policies for the masses to believe and follow. Propaganda is thus a neutral term, and the phenomenon of propaganda is a part of life. To the authorities, propaganda serves both an absolute necessity and a powerful weapon for governing. In China, there is a Department of Propaganda controlled directly by the Central

Committee of the Communist Party; and there are also Department of propaganda and a staff of propagandists in every unit to propagate the government's directives. Here we note that various connotations of propaganda in different cultures contribute to these different interpretations of propaganda. People viewing propaganda from their own perspectives definitely make different conclusions.

The language used in propaganda is a distinct phenomenon in language. As the functions of language take two basic types: psychological and sociological, so the study of propaganda can also be dealt through two major ways: psychological method and sociological approach. Psychological impact is an approach mainly developed in the United States. Ellul (1973:XI) explains that propaganda is "a manipulation of psychological symbols having goals of which the listener is not conscious". By using symbols of authority, prestige and respect that arouse emotions to promote a cause through the process of subconscious transfer or association, propaganda tries to make the public form a judgement without examining the evidence on which it should be based. In this way, propaganda is used to modify, change, and influence the opinion of other people through appeal of emotions.

Another way to study propaganda is by the sociological approach, advocated mainly by Jacques Ellul. This broader mode of social influence has now replaced largely "traditional" persuasion research. To view propaganda from a broader perspective, Ellul put forth his definition of propaganda:

Propaganda is a set of methods employed by an organized group that wants to bring about the active or passive participation in its actions of a mass of individuals psychologically unified through psychological manipulations and incorporated in an organization.(Ibid, 1973:61)

While recognizing the importance of the psychological approach, Ellul emphasizes that propaganda is primarily a sociological phenomenon. The aim of modern propaganda is no longer to modify ideas, but to provoke action. "It is no longer to change adherence to a doctrine, but to make the individual cling to a process of action. It is no longer to lead to a choice, but to loosen

the reflexes. It is no longer to transform an opinion, but to arouse an active belief" (Ibid, 1973:25). The study of the phenomenon of propaganda, therefore, cannot be done without its social context.

C. Language and propaganda

Language is the main medium for expressing and embodying other phenomenon. It expresses and embodies the values, beliefs and meanings which members of a given society share by virtue of their socialization into it and their identification with and acceptance of it. It is interesting to note the similarity between Pike's view toward language and Ellul's view toward propaganda. Pike believes that language is primarily a social fact, a human behavior which affects action, and the study of it is meaningless without the social and cultural context. Ellul, similarly, regards propaganda essentially as a sociological phenomenon with the aim to lead people to action; and the understanding of it should be linked with the context of civilization. In all, propaganda cannot be understood in isolation from products of their contemporary society, such products including social actions and events, and their implicit shared values and meanings — the whole cultural background of a society.

Part II

Modes of propaganda

The most trenchant distinction made by Ellul (*Propaganda*, 1973) within the general phenomenon of propaganda is between agitation propaganda and integration propaganda. Propaganda of agitation is intended to appeal to the emotions of the people, that is, to lead people from mere resentment to rebellion. Propaganda of integration, on the other hand, aims to control people within certain desired patterns and social systems and to make them adjust themselves to fit into the patterns and systems dictated by the group controlling the propaganda. Each type of propaganda employs different means and both are employed throughout the world.

A. propaganda of agitation: the appeal to emotion

Propaganda of agitation has always had a place in the course of history and has been widely used by all kinds of groups or organizations. This kind of propaganda, characteristic of explosive and revolutionary movements, is powerful in that it "tries to stretch energies to the utmost, obtain substantial sacrifices and induce the individual to bear heavy ordeals" (Ibid, 72). Basically, it seeks rebellion or war by destroying the existing government or the established order. All revolutionary movements, all popular wars have been nourished by propaganda of agitation. It can also be made by government to mobilize the entire nation for war, or to pursue a revolutionary cause of action after having been installed in power. For example, the great political campaigns in China were precisely agitation propaganda. Only such propaganda could produce those "great leaps forward". The system of the communes was accepted only because of propaganda of agitation which unleashed simultaneously physical action by the population and a change in their behavior by subverting habits, customs, and beliefs that were obstacles to the "great leaps forward".

The effectiveness of agitation propaganda lies in the fact that it manages to appeal to the violent sentiment within human beings —hatred. It is extremely easy to launch a revolutionary movement based on hatred of a particular enemy. Hatred is probably the most spontaneous and common sentiment; it consists of attributing one's misfortunes to another, who must suffer in order to assure the disappearance of those misfortunes. The Chinese revolution beginning in the early 1920s is just one such example. It was initiated to organize the most impoverished class of peasantry. The Chinese peasants, the majority of the whole population and the lowest of low,

endured unthinkable sufferings all the year round. They were exploited harshly by the landlords. As a result, these peasants could hardly feed their families and were living in starvation. When the Communist Party called upon them to rebel against the landlord class, their hatred toward landlord aroused and unleashed a tremendous energy which proved to be the key element to the success of the Chinese revolution.

Cultural Revolution is another typical example of employing hatred into propaganda. When Mao set to launch another campaign — Cultural Revolution in 1966, he once again appealed to this emotion by stating that some particular careerists attempted to take capitalist road and drag China back to the old days when the labouring people were exploited and oppressed. This surely aroused strong emotional impact among the workers and peasants against those who tried to put misfortune and distress on them. And their hatred led them to support whole-heartedly Mao Zedong against those "capitalist roaders". This is probably one of the main reasons why the CR could last so long a time —10 years.

It is noted that propaganda of agitation succeeds each time it designates someone as the source of all misery. Propagandists must be certain there are always some reasons to hate and someone to hate. Hatred, the ancient and most violent sentiment of all mankind, has been used as a fundamental weapon by propagandists to lead people to action. To hate your enemies is both justifiable and right because they make you suffer.

To the Chinese Communist propagandists, there is always one particular group of enemies serving as the main target of the revolution during a particular historical period. In the 1920s and 1930s, the main enemies of the Chinese revolution were the landlords and warlords. During the Resistance against Japanese Aggression, the Japanese aggressors were the number one enemy of the nation. After 1945 when the Japanese surrendered, the Kuomintang became the main enemy. Since the founding of the People's Republic, there have been constant political campaigns on the national scale in which a certain group of individuals has been singled out as the enemy. Table 1 presents chronologically some of the major events in the 50s and 60s. What is important to point out here is that hatred, aroused by propaganda of agitation, can lead people to employ all sorts of cruel means against other human beings, thus bringing about great impact on the advancement of civilization.

Time	Name of the campaigns	Main Targets
1950	Thought reform	Leading intellectuals
1951	Three-anti Campaign—against Corruption,waste,and bureaucratism	Civil servants in the government organizations
1952	Five-anti Campaign —against bribery, tax evasion, fraud, theft of state secrete, and leakage of economic secrets	Civil servants in the government organizations especially in the economic field
1955	Suppression of the counter-revolutionaries	Former landlords, bandits and secret agents serving in the KMT government
1957	Anti-Rightist Campaign	Intellectuals who voiced their critical opinions of the Party and the government
1966-1967	Cultural Revolution	"Capitalist roaders" and "bourgeois intellectuals"

Table 1. Major Political campaigns in the forty years of the People's Republic of China
(Xiaoming, Yang, 1994: 24)

B. Propaganda of integration: process of cognition

Propaganda of integration is propaganda of "conformity". It "seeks to obtain stable behavior, to adapt the individual to his everyday life, to reshape his thought and behavior in terms of the permanent social settings"(Ellul, 1973:74-75). It is a preferred instrument for a government because it aims to stabilize and unify the individuals within the society. Unlike the propaganda of agitation, whose effects are often immediate and obvious, the effect of the latter usually requires protracted efforts to carry it out. It seeks not a temporary excitement but a total molding of the person in depth. However its effects are more profound if successfully implemented. With the

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